

University of Lowell

Office of Public Relations

One University Avenue, Lowell, Massachusetts 01854 Telephone: (617) 452-5000

FOR MORE INFORMATION: Paul F. Marion

JAMES VAN DER ZEE OF LENOX

TO BE HONORED AT UNIVERSITY OF LOWELL

LOWELL, MASS. - The legendary black photographer James Van Der Zee, born in Lenox, Massachusetts in 1886, will be honored in February at the University of Lowell. February 14 - 29 works by Van Der Zee will be on display in Gallery 410, and on February 27 he will present the First Annual James Van Der Zee Photography Awards to winners of a student photo contest sponsored by U. Lowell as part of Black Heritage Month activities.

James Van Der Zee became interested in photography when he was 14 and spent the next years photographing people in Lenox, then in Virginia, and finally in New York City where he opened a studio in 1914 -- Guaranty Photos, in Harlem. Some years later he established the GGG Studio which was his home and work-place until 1969.

For the next decades he recorded Harlem's people, and the 1907-1945 period is considered Van Der Zee's most productive. He captured the Harlem Renaissance in all its glorious personality as his camera faced the black political, sports, arts, and religious celebrities of the day, such as Marcus Garvey, Joe Louis, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, and Daddy Grace.

"Van Der Zee is one of the few photographers who steadily and sensitively recorded the life and times of his people and community. In this sense he was truly a master. Largely self-taught, he did not set out to document the events of his times. His concern was to produce portraits that were both telling and flattering," writes Robert Browning of the Alternative Center for International Arts.

Fortunately, Van Der Zee's work was "rediscovered" in 1967 by Reginald McGhee while researching the 1969 Metropolitan Museum exhibition, "Harlem On My Mind." That same year the James Van Der Zee Institute was founded and he received the American Society of Magazine Photographers' major award. In 1970 he was elected a Fellow for Life of the Metropolitan Museum, which holds 66 of his photos in its permanent collection. His life and work are chronicled in The World of James Van Der Zee (Grove Press, 1970), and James Van Der Zee (Morgan & Morgan, 1973).